

as of the fresh-start date merely because the plan provides a new optional form of benefit with respect to the frozen accrued benefit, if—

(A) The optional form is provided with respect to each employee's entire accrued benefit (i.e., accrued both before and after the fresh-start date);

(B) The plan provided meaningful coverage as of the fresh-start date, as described in paragraph (d)(4) of this section; and

(C) The plan provides meaningful current benefit accruals as described in paragraph (d)(6) of this section.

(iv) *Floor-offset plans.* In the case of a plan that was a floor-offset plan described in § 1.401(a)(4)-8(d) prior to the fresh-start date, an employee's accrued benefit as of the fresh-start date does not fail to be frozen merely because the actuarial equivalent of the account balance in the defined contribution plan that is offset against the defined benefit plan varies as a result of investment return that is different from the assumed interest rate used to determine the actuarial equivalent of the account balance.

(4) *Fresh-start formulas*—(i) *Formula without wear-away.* An employee's accrued benefit under the plan is equal to the sum of—

(A) The employee's frozen accrued benefit; and

(B) The employee's accrued benefit determined under the formula applicable to benefit accruals in the current plan year (current formula) as applied to the employee's years of service after the fresh-start date.

(ii) *Formula with wear-away.* An employee's accrued benefit under the plan is equal to the greater of—

(A) The employee's frozen accrued benefit; or

(B) The employee's accrued benefit determined under the current formula as applied to the employee's total years of service (before and after the fresh-start date) taken into account under the current formula.

(iii) *Formula with extended wear-away.* An employee's accrued benefit under the plan is equal to the greater of—

(A) The amount determined under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section; or

(B) The amount determined under paragraph (c)(4)(ii)(B) of this section.

(5) *Rules of application*—(i) *Consistency requirement.* This paragraph (c)(5) is not satisfied unless the fresh-start rules in this paragraph (c) (and paragraph (d) of this section, if applicable) are applied consistently to all employees in the fresh-start group. Thus, for example, the same fresh-start date and fresh-start formula (within the meaning of paragraph (c)(4) of this section) must apply to all employees in the fresh-start group. Similarly, if a plan makes a fresh start for all employees with accrued benefits on the fresh-start date and, for a later plan year, is aggregated for purposes of section 401(a)(4) with another plan that did not make the same fresh start, the aggregated plan must make a new fresh start in order to use the fresh-start rules for that later plan year or any subsequent plan year.

(ii) *Definition of fresh-start group.* Generally, the fresh-start group with respect to a fresh start consists of all employees who have accrued benefits as of the fresh-start date and have at least one hour of service with the employer after that date. However, a fresh-start group with respect to a fresh start may consist exclusively of all employees who have accrued benefits as of the fresh-start date, have at least one hour of service with the employer after that date, and are—

(A) Section 401(a)(17) employees;

(B) Members of an acquired group of employees (provided the fresh-start date is the date determined under paragraph (c)(5)(iii)(B) of this section); or

(C) Employees with a frozen accrued benefit that is attributable to assets and liabilities transferred to the plan as of a fresh-start date in connection with the transfer (provided the fresh-start date is the date determined under paragraph (c)(5)(iii)(C) of this section) and for whom the current formula is different from the formula used to determine the frozen accrued benefit.

(iii) *Definition of fresh-start date.* Generally, the fresh-start date is the last day of a plan year. However, a plan may use a fresh-start date other than the last day of the plan year if—

(A) The plan satisfied the safe harbor rules of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b) for the period from the beginning of the plan year through the fresh-start date;

(B) The fresh-start group is an acquired group of employees, and the fresh-start date is the latest date of hire or transfer into an acquired trade or business selected by the employer for any employees to be included in the acquired group of employees; or

(C) The fresh-start group is the group of employees with a frozen accrued benefit that is attributable to assets and liabilities transferred to the plan and the fresh-start date is the date as of which the employees begin accruing benefits under the plan.

(6) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules in this paragraph (c):

Example 1. (a) Employer X maintains a defined benefit plan with a calendar plan year. The plan formula provides an employee with a normal retirement benefit at age 65 of one percent of average annual compensation up to covered compensation multiplied by the employee's years of service for Employer X, plus 1.5 percent of average annual compensation in excess of covered compensation, multiplied by the employee's years of service for Employer X up to 40.

(b) For plan years beginning after 1994, Employer X amends the plan formula to provide a normal retirement benefit of 0.75 percent of average annual compensation up to covered compensation multiplied by the employee's total years of service for Employer X up to 35, plus 1.4 percent of average annual compensation in excess of covered compensation multiplied by the employee's years of service for Employer X up to 35. For plan years after 1994, each employee's accrued benefit is determined under the fresh-start formula in paragraph (c)(4)(iii) of this section (formula with extended wear-away), using December 31, 1994, as the fresh-start date.

(c) As of December 31, 1994, Employee M has 10 years of service for Employer X, has average annual compensation of \$38,000, and has covered compensation of \$30,000. Employee M's accrued benefit as of December 31, 1994, is therefore \$4,200 $((1 \text{ percent} \times \$30,000 \times 10 \text{ years}) + (1.5 \text{ percent} \times \$8,000 \times 10 \text{ years}))$. As of December 31, 1995, Employee M has 11 years of service for Employer X, has average annual compensation of \$40,000 (determined by taking into account compensation before and after the fresh-start date), and has covered compensation of \$32,000. Employee M's accrued benefit as of December 31, 1995, is \$4,552, the greater of—

(1) \$4,552, the sum of Employee M's accrued benefit frozen as of December 31, 1994, (\$4,200) and the amended formula applied to Employee M's years of service after 1994 $((0.75$

$\text{percent} \times \$32,000 \times 1 \text{ year}) + (1.4 \text{ percent} \times \$8,000 \times 1 \text{ year})$, or \$352); or

(2) \$3,872, the amended formula applied to Employee M's total years of service $((0.75 \text{ percent} \times \$32,000 \times 11 \text{ years}) + (1.4 \text{ percent} \times \$8,000 \times 11 \text{ years}))$.

Example 2. (a) Employer Y maintains a defined benefit plan, Plan A, that has a calendar plan year. For the 1995 plan year, Plan A satisfies the requirements for a safe harbor plan in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b). Employer Y selects a date in 1995 for all the employees, freezes the employees' accrued benefits as of that date under the rules of paragraph (c)(3) of this section, and, in accordance with the rules of this paragraph (c), amends Plan A to determine benefits for all employees after that date using the formula with wear-away described in paragraph (c)(4)(ii) of this section. The new benefit formula would satisfy the requirements for a safe harbor plan in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b) if all accrued benefits were determined under it.

(b) Because Plan A satisfied the requirements for a safe harbor plan for the period from the beginning of the plan year through the selected date, paragraph (c)(5)(iii)(A) of this section permits the selected date to be a fresh-start date, even if it is not the last day of the plan year. Thus, Plan A satisfies the requirements in this paragraph (c) for a fresh start as of the fresh-start date.

(c) Under § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b)(6)(vii), a plan does not fail to satisfy the requirements of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b), merely because of benefits accrued under a different formula prior to a fresh-start date. Thus, Plan A still satisfies the safe harbor requirements of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b) after the amendment to the benefit formula. Because Plan A satisfied the requirements for a safe harbor plan for the period from the beginning of the plan year, taking the amendment into account, Employer Y may select any date within the plan year (which may be the same date as the first fresh-start date) and apply the fresh-start rules in this paragraph (c) a second time as of that date.

(d) *Compensation adjustments to frozen accrued benefits—(1) Introduction.* In addition to the fresh-start rules in paragraph (c) of this section, this paragraph (d) sets forth requirements that must be satisfied in order for a plan to disregard increases in benefits accrued as of a fresh-start date that are attributable to increases in employees' compensation after the fresh-start date.

(2) *In general.* In the case of a defined benefit plan that is tested under the safe harbors in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b) or § 1.401(a)(4)-8(c)(3), an employee's adjusted accrued benefit (determined under the rules in paragraph (d)(8) of

this section) may be substituted for the employee's frozen accrued benefit in applying the formulas in paragraph (c)(4) of this section (or paragraph (f)(2) of this section, if applicable) if paragraphs (d)(3) through (d)(7) of this section are satisfied. Thus, for example, in determining whether such a plan satisfies § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b), any compensation adjustments to the employee's frozen accrued benefit described in paragraph (d)(8) of this section are disregarded. Similarly, in the case of a defined benefit plan tested under the general test in § 1.401(a)(4)-3(c), the compensation adjustments described in paragraph (d)(8) of this section may be disregarded under the rules of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(d)(3)(iii) if paragraphs (d)(3) through (d)(7) of this section are satisfied. Of course, any increases in accrued benefits exceeding these adjustments must be taken into account under the general test, and a plan providing such excess increases generally will fail to satisfy the safe harbor requirements of § 1.401(a)(4)-3(b). Where paragraphs (d)(3) through (d)(7) of this section are satisfied with respect to a plan as of the fresh-start date, but one or more of those paragraphs fail to be satisfied for a later plan year, further compensation adjustments described in paragraph (d)(8) of this section may not be disregarded in testing the plan under § 1.401(a)(4)-3.

(3) *Plan requirements*—(i) *Pre-fresh-start date*. As of the fresh-start date, the plan must have contained a benefit formula under which benefits of each employee in the fresh-start group that are accrued as of the fresh-start date and are attributable to service before the fresh-start date would be affected by the employee's compensation after the fresh-start date. A plan satisfies this requirement, for example, if it based benefits on an employee's highest average pay over a fixed period of years or on an employee's average pay over the employee's entire career with the employer. A plan does not satisfy this paragraph (d)(3)(i) if the Commissioner determines, based on all of the relevant facts and circumstances, that the plan provision described in the first sentence of this paragraph (d)(3) was added primarily in order to provide additional benefits to HCEs that are dis-

regarded under the special testing rules described in this paragraph (d).

(ii) *Post-fresh-start date*. The plan by its terms must provide that the accrued benefits of each employee in the fresh-start group after the fresh-start date be at least equal to the employee's adjusted accrued benefit (i.e., the frozen accrued benefit as of the fresh-start date, adjusted as provided under paragraph (d)(7) of this section, plus the compensation adjustments described in paragraph (d)(8) of this section).

(4) *Meaningful coverage as of fresh-start date*. The plan must have provided meaningful coverage as of the fresh-start date. A plan provided meaningful coverage as of the fresh-start date if the group of employees with accrued benefits under the plan as of the fresh-start date satisfied the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b) as in effect on that date (determined without regard to section 410(b)(6)(C)). In order to satisfy the requirement in the preceding sentence, an employer may amend the plan to grant past service credit under the formula in effect as of the fresh-start date to NHCEs, if the amount of past service granted them is reasonably comparable, on average, to the amount of past service HCEs have under the plan. Any benefit increase that results from the grant of past service credit to a NHCE under this paragraph (d)(4) is included in the employee's frozen accrued benefit.

(5) *Meaningful ongoing coverage*—(i) *General rule*. The fresh-start group must have satisfied the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b) for all plan years from the first plan year beginning after the fresh-start date through the current plan year. Thus, if a fresh-start group fails to satisfy the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b) for any plan year, this paragraph (d)(5) is not satisfied for that plan year or any subsequent plan year; however, such a failure is not taken into account in determining whether this paragraph (d)(5) is satisfied for any previous plan year.

(ii) *Alternative rules*. Notwithstanding paragraph (d)(5)(i) of this section, a fresh-start group is deemed to satisfy this paragraph (d)(5) for all plan years following the fresh-start date if any

one of the following requirements is satisfied:

(A) *Section 410(b) coverage for first five years.* The fresh-start group must have satisfied the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b) for the first five plan years beginning after the fresh-start date.

(B) *Ratio percentage coverage as of fresh-start date.* The fresh-start group must have satisfied the ratio percentage test of § 1.410(b)-2(b)(2) as of the fresh-start date.

(C) *Fresh start for acquired group of employees.* The fresh-start group must consist of an acquired group of employees that satisfied the minimum coverage requirements of section 410(b) (determined without regard to section 410(b)(6)(C)) as of the fresh-start date.

(D) *Fresh start before applicable effective date.* The fresh-start date with respect to the fresh-start group must have been on or before the effective date applicable to the plan under paragraph (a) or (b) of this section.

(6) *Meaningful current benefit accruals.* The benefit formula and accrual method under the plan that applies to the fresh-start group in the aggregate must provide benefit accruals in the current plan year (other than increases in benefits accrued as of the fresh-start date) at a rate that is meaningful in comparison to the rate at which benefits accrued for the fresh-start group in plan years beginning before the fresh-start date. Whether this requirement is satisfied with respect to a fresh-start group that does not include all employees in the plan with an hour of service after the fresh-start date may be determined taking into account the rate at which benefits are provided to other employees in the plan.

(7) *Minimum benefit adjustment—(i) In general.* In the case of a section 401(l) plan or a plan that imputes disparity under § 1.401(a)(4)-7, the plan must make the minimum benefit adjustment described in paragraph (d)(7)(ii) or (iii) of this section.

(ii) *Excess or offset plans.* In the case of a plan that is a defined benefit excess plan as of the fresh-start date, each employee's frozen accrued benefit is adjusted so that the base benefit percentage is not less than 50 percent of the excess benefit percentage. In the

case of a plan that is a PIA offset plan (as defined in paragraph (2)(iii) of the definition of QSUPP in § 1.401(a)(4)-12) as of the fresh-start date, each employee's offset as applied to determine the frozen accrued benefit is adjusted so that it does not exceed 50 percent of the benefit determined without applying the offset.

(iii) *Other plans.* In the case of a plan that is not described in paragraph (d)(7)(ii) of this section, each employee's frozen accrued benefit is adjusted in a manner that is economically equivalent to the adjustment required under that paragraph, taking into account the plan's benefit formula, accrual rate, and relevant employee factors, such as period of service.

(8) *Adjusted accrued benefit—(i) General rule.* The term adjusted accrued benefit means an employee's frozen accrued benefit that is adjusted as provided in paragraph (d)(7) of this section and then multiplied by a fraction (not less than one), the numerator of which is the employee's compensation for the current plan year and the denominator of which is the employee's compensation as of the fresh-start date determined under the same definition. For purposes of this adjustment, the compensation definition must be either the same compensation definition and formula used to determine the frozen accrued benefit or average annual compensation (determined without regard to § 1.401(a)(4)-3(e)(2)(ii)(A) (use of plan year compensation)).

(ii) *Alternative formula for pre-effective-date fresh starts.* In the case of a fresh-start date before the effective date that applies to the plan under paragraph (a) or (b) of this section, the adjusted accrued benefit may be determined by multiplying the frozen accrued benefit by a fraction (not less than one) determined under this paragraph (d)(8)(ii). The numerator of the fraction is the employee's average annual compensation for the current plan year. The denominator of the fraction is the employee's reconstructed average annual compensation as of the fresh-start date. An employee's reconstructed average annual compensation is determined by—

(A) Selecting a single plan year beginning after the fresh-start date but

beginning not later than the last day of the first plan year to which these regulations apply under paragraph (a) or (b) of this section;

(B) Determining the employee's average annual compensation for the selected plan year under the same method used to determine the employee's average annual compensation for the current plan year under this paragraph (d)(8)(ii); and

(C) Multiplying the employee's average annual compensation for the selected plan year by a fraction, the numerator of which is the employee's compensation as of the fresh-start date determined under the same compensation definition and formula used to determine the employee's frozen accrued benefit and the denominator of which is the employee's compensation for the selected plan year determined under the compensation definition and formula used to determine the employee's frozen accrued benefit.

(iii) *Effect of section 401(a)(17).* In determining the numerators and the denominators of the fractions described in this paragraph (d)(8), the annual compensation limit under section 401(a)(17) generally applies. See, however, § 1.401(a)(17)-1(e)(4) for special rules applicable to section 401(a)(17) employees.

(iv) *Option to make less than the full permitted adjustment.* A plan may limit the increase in an employee's frozen accrued benefit for the current and all future years to a percentage (not more than 100 percent) of the increase otherwise provided under this paragraph (d)(8). Furthermore, the plan may, at any time, terminate all future adjustments permitted under this paragraph (d).

(v) *Alternative determination of adjusted accrued benefit.* In lieu of applying the fractions in paragraph (d)(8)(i) or (ii) of this section, a plan may determine an employee's adjusted accrued benefit by substituting the employee's compensation for the current plan year (determined under the same compensation formula and underlying definition of compensation used to determine the employee's frozen accrued benefit) in the benefit formula used to determine the frozen accrued benefit. For this purpose, insignificant changes in the

underlying definition of compensation to reflect current compensation practices will not be treated as a change in the definition of compensation. A plan may apply the alternative in this paragraph (d)(8)(v), only if it is reasonable to expect as of the fresh-start date that, over time, the use of this method instead of the general rule of paragraph (d)(8)(i) will not discriminate significantly in favor of HCEs.

(9) *Examples.* The following examples illustrate the rules of this paragraph (d).

Example 1. (a) Employer X maintains a defined benefit plan that is an excess plan with a calendar plan year. For plan years before 1989, the plan is integrated with benefits provided under the Social Security Act, providing each employee with a normal retirement benefit equal to one percent of the employee's average annual compensation in excess of the employee's covered compensation, multiplied by the employee's years of service for Employer X. The benefit formula thus provides no benefit with respect to average annual compensation up to covered compensation.

(b) As of December 31, 1988, Employee M has 10 years of service for Employer X and has covered compensation of \$25,000 and average annual compensation of \$20,000. Employee M's average annual compensation has never exceeded \$20,000. Therefore, as of December 31, 1988, Employee M's accrued benefit under the plan is zero.

(c) Effective with the 1989 plan year, the plan is amended to provide each employee with a normal retirement benefit of 0.6 percent of average annual compensation up to covered compensation plus 1.2 percent of average annual compensation in excess of covered compensation, multiplied by the employee's years of service up to 35. The plan also provides that, for plan years after 1988, each employee's accrued benefit is determined under the formula in paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section (formula without wear-away) and, in applying the fresh-start formula, each employee's frozen accrued benefit under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section will be adjusted under this paragraph (d), using the same compensation definition and formula used to determine the frozen accrued benefit under paragraph (d)(8)(i) of this section.

(d) The plan uses the permitted disparity of section 401(l) and thus must also make the minimum benefit adjustment under paragraph (d)(7) of this section. Because the excess benefit percentage under the plan for years before 1989 was one percent, the plan must provide a base benefit percentage for those years of at least 0.5 percent. After the